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Reporters working for CIA would violate press freedoms under the First Amendment

President Carter's endorsement last week of using reporters as CIA operatives overseas sounds an ominous knell. The problem was compounded by another report in which CIA Director Adm. Stansfield Turner admitted he has approved, in three instances, using journalists for secret intelligence operations. Adm. Turner's admission came during a talk last week to the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Mr. Carter's endorsement states that the president would favor using reporters as government employees under "extreme circumstances" involving U.S. security. Adm. Turner was reported as saying that none of the reporters he had approved had been pressed into service, but declined to give further details.

In a time when the freedoms of the press are becoming visibly more and more restricted, this is a serious issue. It should be viewed, by all who value a free and independent press, as having dangerous implications.

The founders of this country well realized the importance of a free press when they gave us the First Amendment. This amendment was designed first and foremost to protect individuals and the press from being coerced in any way by the government. If the press, either through coercion or through willingness, becomes the servant of a government, then that in itself violates the whole concept of the First Amendment. Thomas Jefferson envisioned a press totally independent — a press which could be a watchdog on the government and point out its deficiencies.

If the press is going to be effective in its role as watchdog, it is vitally important that it should have a reputation for credibility. If it sells out to advertisers, to bankers, to farmers or to any other special interest group, including its government, how can it represent its readers any longer? The press's credibility then would depend only on the group the press would be working for.

Most news organizations have been firm and adamant opponents of journalists working in intelligence. And rightly so. They have argued that these practices violate the traditional independence of the press from their government and compromise the correspondents in their work.

This work is important for a number of reasons. The most significant must be that foreign correspondents are the only ones who are able to deal

evenhandedly in international affairs with all the parties involved. They are the only ones who can talk with Israeli President Menachem Begin one day and with Yasser Arafat, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the next. More importantly, they are the only ones who are allowed to. And why are they the only ones who are allowed to? Exactly because they are known by their sources to be completely independent of their government.

Foreign correspondents build up their sources gradually. They build them with the utmost tact, work and diplomacy. They value these sources highly. If they did not have them, we at home would not be able to get the

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